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05-11

January 21, 2005

For Immediate Release:

DANCERS TO CELEBRATE PAST, FUTURE AT AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE BANQUET

CHARLESTON – Ancient and contemporary African and African-American dance will highlight Eastern Illinois University's annual African-American Heritage Banquet.

The banquet, to be held Feb. 5 in the Grand Ballroom of EIU's Martin Luther King Jr. University Union, will begin at 5 p.m. with a social hour. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m., followed by the dance performance. Tickets must be purchased by no later than Feb. 1.

Muntu Dance Theatre of Chicago will help bring to life the theme of the event, "African-American Heritage: Our Past, Your Future."

Formed in 1972, the company presents authentic and progressive interpretations of traditional African dance, music and folklore while creating new works that build on African, Caribbean and African-American cultural traditions.

The company researches the cultural and historical significance of the dances and the societies from which they originate, with the goal of increasing awareness of and appreciation for African culture.

In the Bantu language, "muntu" means "the essence of humanity," which is what the company says it seeks to express in their work and to touch in their audiences. Its mission fits well with that of the banquet.

"I think (the banquet) is all about diversity and inclusion at Eastern, and we hope that one of the ways we can retain students is to acknowledge their culture," said Joycelynn Phillips, chairwoman of the African-American Heritage Committee. "It's a time when African-Americans can validate their culture and when other students can learn about their culture."

The festive, family-oriented event, a collaborative effort by several members of the university community, is part of EIU's month-long African-American Heritage Celebration, held in conjunction with Black History Month.

Tickets may be purchased until Feb. 1 in the Minority Affairs Office, 102 Clinical Services Building, or by calling 581-6690. Tickets are \$15 for adults, or \$7 for students and children 6 and older.

The menu includes baked chicken, fried catfish, penne noodles and marinara sauce, collard greens, green beans, black-eyed peas, white rice, cornbread and warm apple pie a la mode.